

# TOWARDS THE EAST

The newly entered Mason is requested at a certain point in the ceremonies "to approach the East."

The command to the unthinking—and how many brethren have thought of it?—would appear to have been then and there fully and completely obeyed. The candidate moved from one part of the room to another, and after certain formalities "received light."

"To approach the East," the command is so familiar to those who frequent our Lodges, it has come to have very little significance, save as a quaint and traditional way of saying "come here" or "I wish to speak to you" or like commonplace utterances. Yet Masonry is a symbolic system, its ritual is allegorical; did anyone ever approach the East? Certainly none, in this life at least, ever reached it. "As far as the East is from the West," said the Psalmist seeking a figure to express infinity; towards the East is a direction, not a limit, a direction in which we may travel all our lives if we will and yet be no nearer to an end than when we started. But the East is the place of light, and the more we press our symbolic journey towards it the greater illumination we will receive. The command received by the Neophyte was not then and there fulfilled, the goal was not then attained, the light received was only a figure of the reality. The command is one to be followed and only by his own effort, his own thinking upon these things, can the Mason approach the goal thus set in view.

A survey of the situation at the present time, in this country—there is no need to go further afield—raises the insistent question of what it is that men see in Freemasonry that they wish to belong to it; it being so painfully obvious that they do not see at all what it really is.

There are more than three million Masons in the United States. Is there among them one in a hundred who has heard and followed, as he could, the injunction to travel to the East? It is doubtful. But if no more, then there are nearly three million Masons who know nothing of Masonry more than they heard when they "passed through" the degrees. Is it any wonder that so many in good standing are irregular in attendance at Lodge, or regular in their absence? We all know the categories in which they are classed. The man who comes on election nights, the man who comes to special functions, the man who comes when there are refreshments. They are, en masse, continually being lectured, rebuked, exhorted, pleaded with, in almost every Masonic periodical, by almost every Masonic speaker. But are they really so much to blame? When the proportion of delinquents is so great it is surely symptomatic of something unhealthy in the general state of affairs rather than a matter of individual will.

But even if this be granted we are yet far from being able to diagnose the case. One says this and another says that, and the probability is that it results from a number of complex causes. It may be that the Craft in America is headed the wrong way. We may be like passengers on a ship, looking to the East while the vessel carries us towards the North, the place of darkness.

In conversation recently a certain brother asked the writer the question, "Why do men become Masons?" and he admitted that he could not answer. From the outside he would appear an enthusiastic worker. He has served his Lodge and been honored by election to its highest offices. Next year he will

normally be chosen to preside over his Chapter. He is a good ritualist and has endeavored to put his life into the ceremonies so far as he himself has received light, and yet in confidence he admits he does not know why he is a Mason, or why he should be one. The ritual is beautiful and impressive when well worked, but when it is seen two, three or more times a night, twice or thrice every month it begins to pall. Most of us can agree. He has looked for fraternity, and to some extent has found it, but he feels that it is so diluted by the number of Masons with whom he cannot fraternize that it seems to mean little more than ordinary friendship formed outside the Craft. Have not many of us felt the same? He looked for high ideals in the rulers of the Craft and—there is no need here to repeat the details—found petty intrigues and ambitions, jealousies, rancors and indifference. He is willing to admit that there are exceptions that stand out like shining lights, but his point is that the proportion of such exceptions seems to be no higher in a Grand Lodge or Grand Chapter (which, in theory, are composed of the elite of a picked body of men) than are to be found in any chance gathering.

And so it seems as if this good brother, who to outward appearance is a zealous Mason, is really very likely in a year or so to become another absentee, another workman lost to the Craft.

What should he do? What should the hundreds and perhaps thousands who are in like case do? It is not easy to say, but one thing would help greatly, and that would be to turn the eye of criticism inwards and ask:

"Do I act as a brother towards my fellow Masons?" "Do I seek after the ideal and avoid the petty and mean?" "Am I the kind of man that brings honor and credit to the Craft?" "Will those who know me conceive a favorable opinion of the Institution?"

Freemasonry is a fraternity, a brotherhood; whatever else it may be or ought to be, it is this fundamentally or it is nothing. Now in such an organization every member is entitled to its benefits, to the regard, the friendship and the assistance, when needed, of all the others. If not, then what is it all about? What do our Masonic obligations mean? Every Mason is entitled to expect, to receive all this, but only on the condition that he is always ready to give. It is a case where if we seek our own things we lose all, we can only gain by seeking a brother's welfare. If every Mason truly and actively regarded Masonry as an organization through which he may serve and help others, one sufficient answer to the problem would be found.

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